CASH & CARRY

MARKETING CULTURE

THE FAST FOOD ISSUE

IT'S A FREE LUNCH!

Issue No. 1

CASH & CARRY

Issue No. 1 – Summer 2024

Read and share this issue digitally!

Why would anyone create a zine in 2024?

We've always been obsessed with magazines. From big-name periodicals like **The New Yorker** and **MAD**, to scrappy zines like **MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL** and the countless self-published screeds that friends would hand out at punk shows, to hyper-focused publications like **Lucky Peach, Animerica**, **RES** and **MOLD**. And of course we can't forget the ultra-luxe books, either – **Interview, Wallpaper, Monocle, W** and more.

Today, we still see a lot of appeal for the printed word. Substack is awesome, but nothing beats opening the mailbox and finding something crisp and heavy, ready to be cracked open and read from cover to cover.

So we're experimenting with a zine of our own – it's rough, it's photocopied, and each page's layout was done with real glue, scissors and tape. Our work in branding, consumer insights, and innovation gives us a unique window into the workings of the marketing world, and this is an opportunity to share our perspective. It's a place where we are free to explore topics that fascinate us, with the space to go deep and tackle unexpected angles.

In this issue, we ended up splitting it between two! So choose which side you want to start from, and dig in. We hope you enjoy.

The CE Team
NYC
Summer 2024

Created by

CONSUMER EYES

HOW CHICKEN TOOK FLIGHT

When it came to bird vs. burger, chicken was long a distant second. Here's how the gap is closing.

Chicken has always had a place in fast food — thanks, KFC and McNuggets — but in the last decade its popularity has skyrocketed. Chicken is front-and-center at the hottest up-and-comers, like **Raising Cane's** and **Bojangles**, as well as dynamic national players like **Popeye's** and **Chick-fil-A**. In February, McDonalds even acknowledged that they're selling **roughly as much chicken as beef.**

What happened? Well, we can tell you one thing that **didn't** happen. The old argument for chicken, that it's a healthier option for calorie-counters, seems to have had **zero** influence on chicken's rise at fast food outlets. The most popular options are fried chicken sandwiches and wings dripping in sauce, and their appeal is planted firmly in **flavor and texture.**

In a recent article in **AdAge**, Bret Thorn, the senior food and beverage editor for **Nation's Restaurant News**, gave his take: "Chicken is a trendy protein. Chicken wings also travel well and can be delivered well. Gen Z and millennials like boneless chicken because it's easier to eat, and they can forget they're **eating a dead bird.**"

Particularly key, he said, is that wings are easy for franchises because they're **a singular item that is modified only by sauces.** We've seen a similar tack taken by the chicken finger specialists at Raising Cane's, where chicken fingers can be put in a bun to easily make a sandwich offering.

From fiery, tongue-scorching Nashville Hot Chicken to uber crunchy Korean fried chicken (keep your eye on Bonchon,) chicken is somewhat of a blank canvas that lends itself to battering, dipping and saucing. That, plus its easy prep and delivery, portend the continued rise of this fast food favorite.

Battle of the Charismatic Chicken Entrepreneurs

What is it about chicken restaurants that attracts larger-than-life characters? Al Copeland and Colonel Sanders are two of our favorites — forget about the food for a moment and choose a side:

Al Copeland was a quintessential New Orleans businessman. He founded the **Popeye's** chicken empire in 1972 (named not after **Popeye the Sailor**, in fact, but **Popeye Doyle**, Gene Hackman's character in *The French Connection.)* He was known for being larger than life — he loved offshore powerboat racing, extravagant weddings, and the occasional dustup with rivals. After his death, his family proposed construction of **"a life-sized statue of the flamboyant businessman holding a box of Popeye's fried chicken and a checkered racing flag, a speedboat at his feet, all set amid columns."**

Colonel Sanders is inseparable from the **KFC** empire he founded. But before opening his restaurant, he was also a steam engine stoker, lawyer (a stint that ended in a courtroom brawl with a client), insurance salesman, ferry operator, and **honorary colonel.** He was also known for his **prolific, creative swearing.** In the early days of his restaurant, he even **wounded a competitor in a shootout**, but was acquitted of all charges.

WHY FAST FOOD?

Farm To Table and the Slow Food Movement may have done their best – but the death of Fast Food has been wildly exaggerated

HERE'S WHY WE'VE DEDICATED AN ISSUE TO FAST FOOD IN 2024

Back in February, Taco Bell did something that seemed a little bizarre, but at the same time totally inevitable.

The taco chain hosted an Apple-style livestream event in Las Vegas called *Live Mas Live*, where they revealed new menu items for 2024 as part of an IRL spectacle that included live music and celebrity cameos. Coverage blew up on social media, and it was perhaps the strongest sign yet that **fast food's cultural clout is growing.** Across the quick-serve landscape, **celebrity collabs and LTOs are treated like album drops,** drawing huge lines.

How could this be? Wasn't the Slow Food movement supposed to be fast food's death knell? Weren't we all going to be eating farm-to-table quinoa bowls? These new movements had framed the old guard as *uncultured* food — a category painted in broad strokes as rootless, alienating, shallow. The food of the strip mall and the drive-thru.

Fast food.

And yet, fast food has its own culture — one that runs deep, and connects to powerful, formative memories in the American psyche. **Fast food is pop culture**, and just like top 40 radio or megaplex cinemas, its popularity reflects a deep bond with its fans. **Fast food might not be highbrow, but it's *ours*.**

The link between fast food and pop culture goes back to the beginning, whether you're talking about **White Castle** and its clean, crisp tile that echoed the popular **"hygienic"** food obsession of the 1930s, or **McDonalds** and the way it perfectly fit like a puzzle piece into the car-centric zeitgeist of postwar America. The bond between fast food and other elements of culture — **music, movies, games** — really hit a fever pitch in the 1980s and 1990s, when fast food advertising was the backbone of Saturday morning tv programming.

A kid knew which summer movies they needed to see by checking out the kids' meal toy tie-ins. The characters of **McDonaldland** and the **Burger King Kids' Club** were household names. Both restaurants also briefly sold music cassettes and VHS tapes of popular movies and TV shows (if you grew up in a household that had a tape of ***Raiders of the Lost Ark*** or ***Fievel Goes West***, there's a good chance your folks bought it with a burger). McDonalds even flirted with creating its own content, producing a cartoon, a series of Ronald McDonald video games and collaborating on the bizarre 1988 E.T. knockoff, ***Mac & Me***.

As regulations tightened regarding advertising to children, this era largely faded away, and marketing efforts had to refocus. Back during the golden age of fast food culture, marketing to adults had been a particularly hard nut to crack — think of the **Arch Deluxe** or the delightfully surreal **Mac Tonight**, neither of which quite caught fire. In the 2000s and early 2010s, it seemed to be getting even harder — a wave of anti-fast-food sentiment was growing, driven by thought leaders like Michael Pollan and Alice Waters at the leading edge, and the movie *Super Size Me* in the mainstream. Jamie Oliver was teaching us to make meals from vegetables grown at home, organic was aspirational, and Whole Foods became a national phenomenon.

That level of dietary piety can be difficult to maintain, though, and fast food brands discovered that they didn't need to follow along; they could reposition themselves as a pressure release valve. Even if consumers had been eating kale during the week — or especially if they had — they were still eager, from time to time, for hyper indulgences. Maxed out fast food items, presented with a high level of self-awareness, answered this need perfectly. An early standout was the aptly-named **KFC Double Down**, essentially a bacon and cheese sandwich in which the bread was replaced with **two fried chicken filets.**

In the mid-2010s, this kind of **menu-as-culture** phenomenon blossomed. Remarkably, what would become the poster child for this movement came from outside the burger continuum. Burger joints have had plenty of great entries in this canon, of course, but the quintessential item would have to be the **Doritos Locos Taco** — a hard-shell taco that dusted in nacho cheese Dorito powder. It created a mind-bending (for 2012) crossover between two previously unrelated food brands. It was just a little bit preposterous, but also totally intuitive and immediately appealing, and it was a massive hit. Taco Bell had been exploring unusual, over-the-top menu items since the late '90s, but this collab felt like a cultural event.

Today, unique menu items and disruptive LTOs are common across the fast food landscape, and the energy seems to be shifting again. The decline of broadcast TV has narrowed one of the most crucial avenues of communication for fast food brands. Add in the fact that younger consumers are increasingly interested in drive-through, meaning that brands can't even depend on their own in-restaurant experience to telegraph their identity and culture, and we find ourselves in a moment where **brands are dependent on the consumer's smartphone to continue to drive cultural relevance.**

Where do we go from here?

Increasingly, it's looking like **the app is the future of fast food culture.** Fast food apps are booming — according to QSR magazine, **downloads were up more than 10% in 2022** — with consumers drawn in largely by the prospect of app-only deals. Now that an installed user base exists, the challenge is to transform occasional opportunists into regular users. Apps are becoming **stickier**, with **notifications, special bonuses and unique offers**, but they're also becoming more of a **mouthpiece for the brand**, where culture and content can be pushed out. Check out McDonalds' recent **WcDonalds** promo (see our article in this issue!) to uncover more about how they're leveraging their app to entertain and engage.

What will apps look like in, say, 5 years? Our half-serious predictions:

- **The first TV series launched on a fast food app**
- **In-app games, with free food for high scores**
- **In-app chat, or integration with your group chat. Putting together an order for your crew? Let everyone add their own meal to the cart.**
- **Dating, with in-restaurant meetups**
- **Serialized romance novels, pushed out weekly via app**

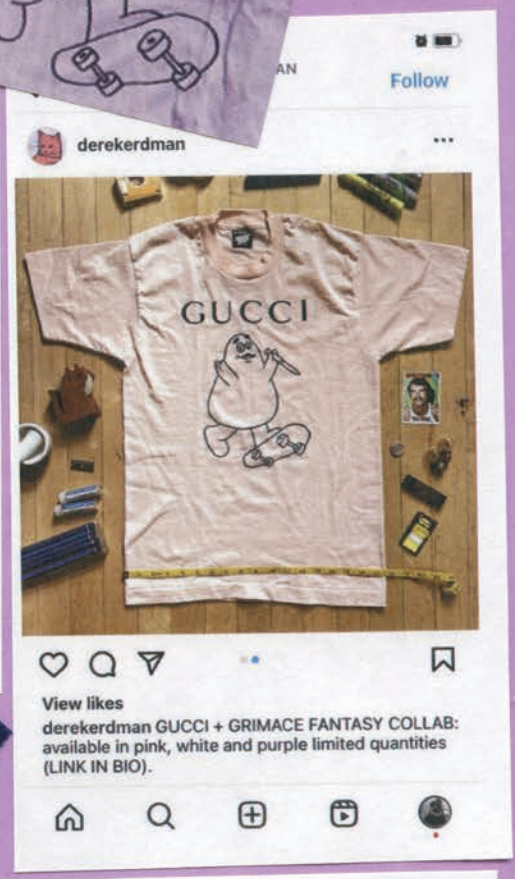
Gucci Grimace

Cease & Desist or Embrace & Encourage?

Something purple was in the air at the beginning of 2023. McDonalds was planning a major promotion involving Grimace, their gumdrop-shaped purple icon from the '80s, and an artist from Chicago, Derek Erdman, was at the same time inspired to create a bootleg icon. Already known for t-shirts that paired the iconic Gucci logo with unexpected imagery or logos (Karl Marx's face, Masonic symbolism, ants,) he created a screenprint depicting a skateboarding Grimace, knife in hand, over the Italian fashion brand's moniker. It was magic.

The shirt was a hit, and Gucci swiftly responded with a terse and anonymous cease-and-desist letter. So, of course, Erdman made photocopies of the letter, and included one with each shirt he sold. Instant ephemera.

But that's not the end of the story, because a little while later he got an email, this time from McDonalds. But the tone was a little different...


Follow
derekerdman
GUCCI
View likes
derekerdman GUCCI + GRIMACE FANTASY COLLAB: available in pink, white and purple limited quantities (LINK IN BIO).

Derek,
I wanted to let you know that your Grimace T-Shirt was a topic of discussion at our weekly meeting this week. While I haven't checked with our legal department, we got a very big kick out of your tribute to Grimace, and it tied in nicely with his birthday festivities this year.

We'd love to purchase 25 shirts for our marketing team. Is there any possibility that you could make them in purple? If you're willing, let me know and we'll talk about price and sizes.

You're welcome to post this message on your social media, but do me the favor of covering up my name. I'll also deny that I sent it. Thanks for the laugh and we'll see you in court.

[REDACTED]

Visible
11:07 AM
DEREKERDMAN
Posts
Follow
derekerdman
McDonald's
Grimace T-Shirt
Inbox
4:58 PM
to me
Derek,
I wanted to let you know that your Grimace T-Shirt was a topic of discussion at our weekly meeting this week. While I haven't checked in with our legal department, we got a very big kick out of your tribute to Grimace, and it tied in nicely with his birthday festivities this year.
We'd love to purchase 25 shirts for our marketing team. Is there any possibility that you could make them purple? If you're willing, let me know and we'll talk about price and sizes.
You're welcome to post this message on your
2,582 likes
derekerdman Either the world has crumpled in on itself or McDonalds has a sense of humor. While legal eagles battle over fair use of the Gucci logo,

Trademark law is complicated, and we get that you can't just let anyone bootleg your IP without risking the loss of your trademark — but we think this was a pretty smart move on the part of Mickey D's, particularly as we shift away from traditional advertising campaigns toward social media publicity efforts.

The shirt is currently sold out, but follow Derek's work on IG at @derekerdman

COLLABORATION

Finding an unexpected dance partner is the quickest way to grab some headlines – and the right synergy can yield out-the-door lines. Here are some of the biggest fast food brands' partners over the last decade:

2012

Taco Bell
Doritos Tacos Locos

2015

Taco Bell
Cap'n Crunch Delights

2018

KFC
Crocs

2022

Taco Bell
Secret Aardvark

2022

Taco Bell
Klondike

2022

KFC
Jack Harlow

2022

Popeyes
Megan Thee Stallion

2023

Taco Bell
Yellowbird

2023

Taco Bell
Yeastie Boys

X NATION

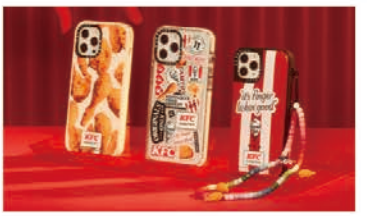
2020

McDonalds
Travis Scott

2021

Taco Bell
Truff

2021



KFC
CASETiFY

2022

Taco Bell
Milk Bar

2022

McDonalds
Verdy

2022

McDonalds
Cactus Plant Flea Market

2023

McDonalds
Be@rbrick

2023

McDonalds
Kerwin Frost

2023

McDonalds
Tetris

Quality At Speed

Startup Kernel Uses Robots to Make Real Food, Really Fast

C&C headed down to 24th Street here in Manhattan to pick up lunch at the first Kernel outpost. It's a new QSR concept headed up by **Steve Ells**, founder and former CEO of **Chipotle**. While we were picking up our order, we took a minute to chat with **Chief Culinary Officer Andrew Black** about what makes Kernel unique.

C&C: How did Kernel come about?

Andrew: About 5 years ago, Steve [Ells] and I started talking about what the next restaurant could be, and we just sort of organically started assembling a team and a menu. One of our main goals was to reduce waste. And so we created a unique operating system, which involved building ergonomic stations and reducing food waste by only sending small quantities out to the restaurants from our central kitchen. We're even thinking about how a worker moves, and even wasted movements are accounted for.

C&C: Are we talking about literal human movement at a station?

Andrew: Yeah, I mean if you look around, it's a small space. You only have three employees to produce a lot of food per hour, and one oven and a toaster. So we're doing a lot of work offsite in a central kitchen.

C&C: What came first for you — the menu or the restaurant "OS"?

Andrew: It definitely started with the menu, but then the CTO and his team have developed the automation that lets us make it efficient. We're continuing to iterate, evolve and learn, and it's priming this operating platform for what's coming next.

C&C: How do robots factor into the plan?

Andrew: So, we actually didn't even start with a robot. At first the plan was really manual, then a more basic pick-and-place system, and now we've moved into using the robot. Behind it are portion trays of food, and when an order comes in it will pick that item out, put it in the oven where it cooks for about two and a half minutes, then take it out at exactly the right time, and present it to the person working on the assembly station for the next steps.

C&C: Do you think robots will become a bigger part of this restaurant going forward?

Andrew: We're definitely interested in automation, but we don't have an exact picture of what that will be. What we know right now is there's low hanging fruit that we can apply it to to make the system even better.

One of the aspects of the business that I think is really special is that the food is made really quickly – if we say it's going to be ready at 1:25, it's ready. That's our version of hospitality. But it's freshly made, whole ingredients, prepared with a lot of care.

C&C: This sounds almost like a modern automat, which has some history here in NYC.

Andrew: Yeah, I mean, we know that people want reliable timing for pickup orders. We really like the food, and feedback has been really positive so far.

C&C: What's next for Kernel?

Andrew: More locations in New York, starting with Manhattan, and we'll just keep learning along the way!

OUR TOP PICKS

What to try when you order:

Crispy Chicken Sandwich

Kernel Burger

Marinated Beets

Roasted Carrots

Kernel Salad

Chocolate Chunk Cookie

BEYOND THE ARCHES

Talking Fast Food Architecture with the Retrologist

C&C recently sat down with Rolando Pujol, better known as the Retrologist, to talk about the history and future of fast food restaurant design. Pujol has been obsessed with commercial architecture since he was a child, and no one has more obsessively catalogued and tracked the shifting landscape of American roadside architecture.

C&C: Tell us a little about your background, and how you came to be the Retrologist.

RP: I like to say that this all began in the back seat of my parents' **1978 Ford Fairmont** station wagon, because I'd be just looking out the window, and I was always a curious observer, even as a little kid. I would get obsessed with certain landmarks in our day-to-day travels, whether it be a muffler man outside of a gas station, or an auto repair shop that has the smiling bear logo. But I really got into commercial and roadside architecture in my 20s and 30s, particularly after 9/11, when we suddenly lost the twin towers. I began looking at everything around me in a fresh way, with appreciation and wonder for the mundane as well as the grand. I was a managing editor at **AM New York** for about six years, and we had a blog called **Urbanite** that covered a lot of these topics. Eventually, I began to do a show for **NBC** called **Hidden City**, in the late 2000s. My **Retrologist** work really began around 2012 when I started a Tumblr, then an Instagram, and I started getting interviewed by newspapers like the **Washington Post**, featured in Neil Patrick Harris' newsletter and on **Atlas Obscura.**

C&C: Could you take us through a little history of fast food architecture?

The company that best reflects the evolution of the zeitgeist is, of course, **McDonalds** – they began as a barbecue stand in 1940 in San Bernardino, California, and evolved into a primarily drive-in restaurant. Then **Ray Kroc** comes along, figures out they have a pretty good thing going. Already, the foundations of the basic architectural style are in place – the architect, Stan Meston, came up with a basic design that was a walk-up building, with **double arches** flanking the sides, a glass front, and really no place to actually go indoors – no indoor seating. Just a place you walk up to, bring the food back to your car, and go home. It really represented the ideas of the '50s – it was efficient, inexpensive, and very, very car centric.

Classic Double-Arch McDonalds in Downey, CA
Photo by Rolando Pujol

So in the '50s, McDonalds was doing that really gaudy neon highway-oriented style, these spectacular signs with **Chef Speedee**. By the '60s, they want to keep growing, but as they start moving into downtowns in suburban communities, the zoning boards aren't having it. Nothing about the food, but the buildings are seen as tacky, they look like they're straight out of Las Vegas, and it wouldn't fly out in Westchester or Nassau County. And that's why, in 1968, they shift to the **Mansard Roof** look, with brick exteriors, which were seen as more elegant. And the design of those restaurants wasn't totally uniform, but reflected regional nuance. If you were in a railroad town, you might end up getting a railroad-themed McDonalds, and that kind of thing played very well with town elders and zoning boards. And with that more elegant Mansard look, the locations really spread like wildfire.

Interestingly enough, they were not the first chain to introduce a drive thru lane. **Jack in the Box** did it as early as the '40s or '50s, and Wendy's had widespread pickup windows as early as 1970. **Dave Thomas**, the founder of **Wendy's**, thought it was important to have a car-centric option, but he didn't want to call it a drive-thru because he was worried people would think of it like a drive-in, where you'd get your food and then lollygag in the parking lot. So he actually called it a **pick-up window**. He didn't want teenagers hanging out, making a mess...it was just get your food and go, unless you want to sit in the restaurant.

Classic Mansard McDonalds
Photo by Rolando Pujol

From there, things didn't really change until the early 2000s. Sales were slowing for McDonalds, and the chain was starting to feel a little tired. And just as Ray Kroc had said in the 60s, "we need to fix our architecture problem," their then-CEO essentially said, "**that damn mansard roof, that's the problem**" – and so, starting around 2006, you begin to see different design experiments, with not only different looks, but different flows. That eventually led to where we are now, which is essentially a **gray or black cube**, maybe with a little dash of red somewhere. And today, there are already very few Mansard-style McDonalds left.

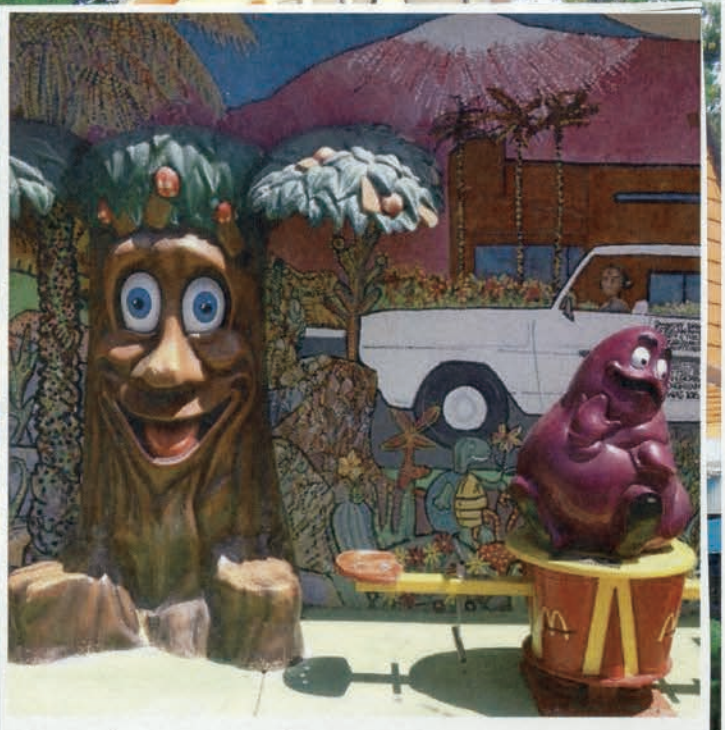
There are a few locations that were built in the late '90s, early 2000s, under a program which intended to mimic the earliest McDonalds in a **retro** way, with the double arches, but now they're even muting the color scheme on those – taking the red and yellow away and making them more gray and **Soviet-style**.

As far as I know, there are only two locations that still have the original '50s to '60s look - one in **Downey, California**, which is the oldest operating McDonalds, and another in **San Jose** that has the big classic arches flanking the building.

A "New Look" McDonalds circa 2008
Source: Wikipedia

C&C: Why do you think there has been this trend toward a more anonymous look in fast food architecture?

RP: I think it reflects what's happening in our culture. With this blank, monotonous, **pseudo-Bauhaus** look that a lot of the fast food chains today have, part of it is that I think they're trying to de-link their connection with children and childhood. But they're also reflecting shifts in behavior around fast food, where the interior dining experience is less important, and people are leaning more toward drive-thru or delivery. It's no longer like in the '70s, when a family would say hey, let's go to McDonalds, and everybody piles into the station wagon. And the kids run around in **McDonaldland** while mom and dad smoke a couple of cigarettes and eat their **Filet O' Fish.** That kind of scenario isn't totally gone, but it's not so central to the experience anymore, either – today, it almost **doesn't matter what the interior of the place looks like.**



Apple Pie Tree and Grimace, outside the San Bernardino McDonalds museum
Photo by Rolando Pujol

Another difference is that these bigger chains really don't have to do as much to draw attention to themselves. There's a huge amount of consumer awareness already established, and if you're out on the road you're more likely to find a place to eat via GPS than by looking for signs along the highway.

C&C: It's interesting that fast food has its roots in grab-and-go, then shifted to focus on sit-down experience in the late 20th century, and now seems to be returning to its roots, in a way.

RP: That's really true! It's a little bit of a strange game that they're playing, because on the one hand they seem to be erasing their architectural heritage, but then at the same time they're doing these campaigns, like [McDonalds' promotion for] **Grimace's Birthday**, or the **Cactus Plant** figurines, that really embrace the craziness, and goofiness, and colorfulness of the heritage of the brand. They put so much energy into the Grimace marketing, but if you went into a restaurant during that campaign, there was nothing!

C&C: What do you think is the future of fast food restaurant design?

RP: Right now, I'm leaving open the possibility of some sort of revival – of people returning to these places and using them the way that they were intended to be used, which is, you know, that they were great **third places.** We live in a time when there are fewer and fewer of them; even the places that we used to go in malls are going away. Big bookstores are going away, although Barnes and Noble is enjoying a very interesting revival, which I think nobody saw coming. But I do like the idea of there being places where people can gather.

Even though the trend seems to be going toward fewer dining rooms, more drive-thru, more delivery, I could imagine a scenario where someone decides to go counter to this trend and says, you know, we're going to start opening **big dining rooms.**

Last year, McDonalds created an immersive experience at a location in **Bensonhurst, Brooklyn**, to promote the new season of **Loki.** They redesigned the whole interior to look like it was 1992, and it was sensational, even though it was only up for three days. I ended up connecting with the guy who's their de facto historian, and he told me about how they went through their archives to get everything right and period-correct. So there's definitely interest in this kind of experience, even while in reality they're moving further away from it.

At the same time, we know **ghost kitchens** are a big trend, and at least one chain — **Arthur Treacher's**, the fish and chip chain, which currently only has only one remaining proper standalone location, in **Ohio** — has looked at coming back entirely via a ghost kitchen model.

Personally, I would love to see a return to these restaurants being exciting, interesting places that you can look forward to visiting, and which give you a feeling of fun and escape. When you walk into one of the very few older, '80s-style McDonalds or Burger King restaurants that are left, you're really transported. Now it's because it feels like time travel, but even in their day, they were meant to feel and look like a **distinct, special experience.** Our built environment has become so boring and banal, and it would be nice to see more color, more design, and more imagination.

Follow the Retrologist on Instagram @rolandopujol and on Substack at rolandopujol.substack.com

Early McDonalds arch
Photo by Rolando Pujol

McDonalds automated order kiosk
Source: Wikipedia

CosMc Journey

C&C grabs lunch at the first outpost of McDonalds' newest restaurant experiment

McDonald's has been mining its old McDonaldland IP recently, bringing back Grimace for a birthday celebration last year and even taking the Hamburglar out of cold storage for some promotions. **But it's CosMc, the little-remembered burger-loving alien from the mid-80s, who has been singled out for the biggest role.** He has lent his name, if not his face, to a new small-format, beverage-forward restaurant concept from McDonalds.

The first location opened outside of Chicago in 2023, and we sent our intrepid Zillennial midwest correspondents, Connor and Mary, to check it out. **Here's their report.**

C&C: What's the scoop on CosMc's? How is it different from McDonald's?

C: They put way more energy into their drinks, with pretty limited food options. It seems **really breakfast-themed** in terms of savory food, which makes it weird that the main focus was **crazy-sweet drinks**, as if that's a normal breakfast combo.

Food options include **pretzel bites, breakfast sandwiches**, and **milkshakes/frozen drinks.** Compare that to McDonalds, which has a flagship item — a burger — and the rest of the menu complements that. Right now, CosMc's feels a little like someone threw darts at a wall. I think they need to focus on a **signature item.**

C&C: Who do you think this is for?

M: With the focus on drinks and drive-thru, **it felt like a Sonic!** The drinks feel like they could be targeting **middle school suburban girls.** If I had to guess, I would say they're trying to get away from fast food and toward **upper-middle-class suburban beverage culture**, places like **Starbucks.**

C: It seems like a place that exists in a suburb or just on highway stop offs, for **people driving who need a bite.** The format is really **car-centric**, unless it changes substantially when they open more. With all the cold drinks, this might work better in warm weather locations.

C&C'S TOP SANDWICH PICK

Spicy Queso Sandwich

C: This was a hit! I thought this was actually a solid sandwich. Didn't know what to expect based on its name, so surprised when I saw the egg. The sauce was good, the sausage and egg were standard McDonald's quality (in a good way) and it had crispy what I believe are fried jalapeño bites on the top. Definitely the best thing we had from here.

M: That one was good! A decent breakfast sandwich. If I was going to order anything again from here it would be this. Name confused me - I didn't know it would be a breakfast sandwich with an egg based on the name spicy queso sandwich.

Forbidden Fast Food

THE MENU ITEMS YOU WON'T SEE STATESIDE

You could argue that no food is more foreign than American-chain fast food from another country. Within a radius of a few blocks of our office in Manhattan, you can sample just about any world cuisine you desire. But you know what you can't get for love or money? A McRaclette.

Unless, of course, you're at McDonald's HQ in Chicago, where the in-house restaurant offers a rotating menu of sample items from across their global menus. If they open another one, it had better be here in NYC.

Here are some of the most interesting items we've encountered on global fast food menus, reflecting regional tastes, supply chains and cultural expectations.

Chocolate Whopper
Burger King Thailand

Tikka Masala Burrito
Taco Bell India

Pork Floss Seaweed Donut
Dunkin' China

Maharaja Mac
McDonalds India

Durian Balls
KFC Malaysia

McRaclette
McDonalds Switzerland

"Cheeseburger"
Burger King Thailand

Taro Pie
McDonalds Malaysia, China + Hawaii

Cottage Cheese McMuffin
McDonalds Poland

Marmite Stuffed Crust Pizza
Pizza Hut New Zealand

WCDONALDS IS A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE OF FAST FOOD MARKETING

This March, McDonalds launched a campaign that would involve temporarily rebranding several of their locations as “WcDonalds” — a reference to the trademark-dodging name that manga and anime writers use when their stories need to feature an iconic fast food restaurant. They also incorporated the flipped M on cups, bags and more, across most McDonalds locations in the US.

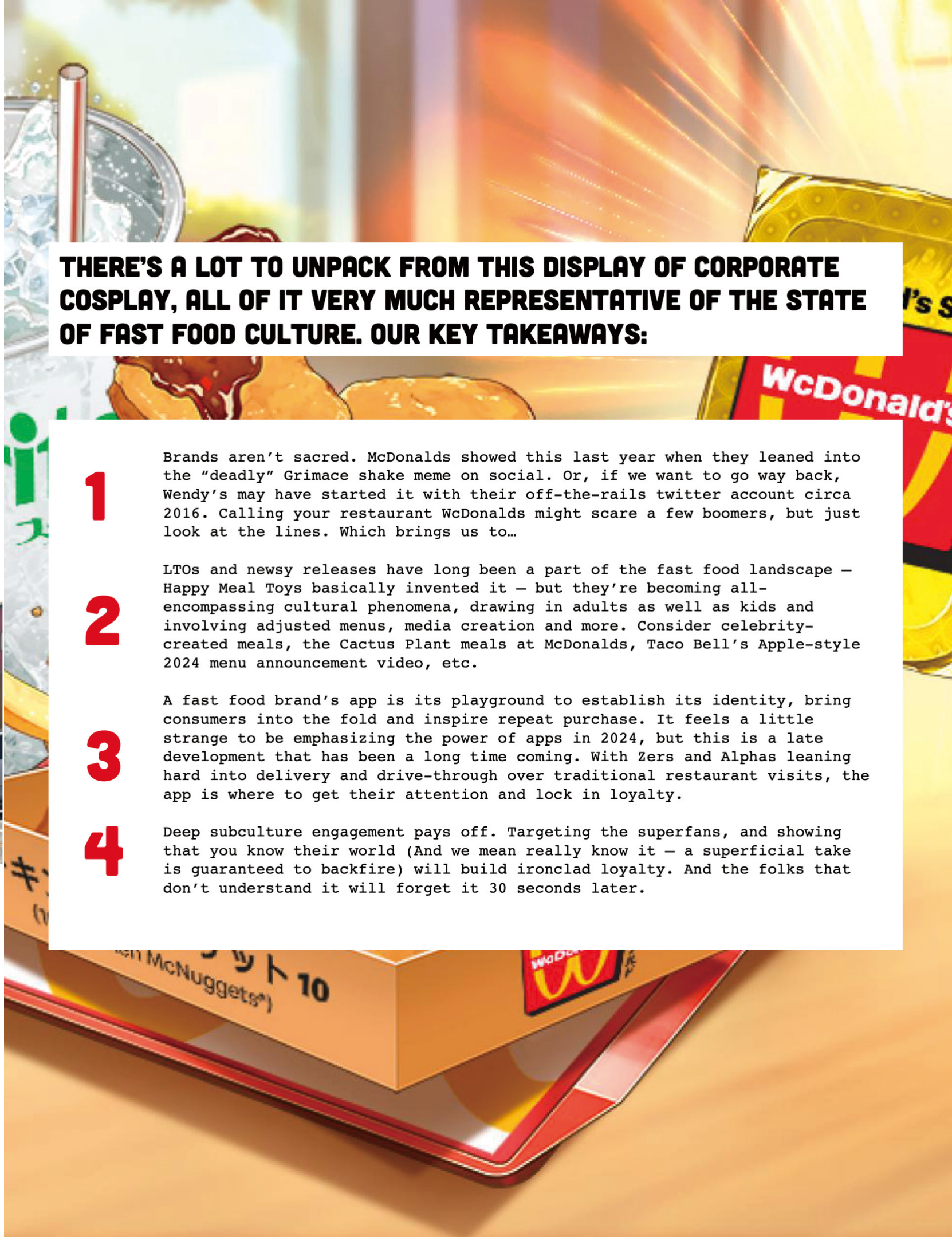
Along with the rebrands, WcDonalds-themed manga and even a limited-run anime series were released throughout the month, all orchestrated through — and unlocked via — their app. The content isn’t exactly long-form, but McD’s cred is secure; they tapped some heavy-hitters from Japan to produce the manga and anime, including famed illustrator Acky Bright and production house Studio Pierrot, best known for hit anime series Naruto.

THE LINE OUTSIDE A WCDONALDS BRANDED LOCATION IN LA

THE BOOMER-CONFUSION SPARKED BY THE WCDONALDS CAMPAIGN MIGHT BE THE BEST PART

The Colony, TX Chatter
Can anyone tell me why I got this cup in Texas? I thought it was McDonald. What it the writing on the side?

facebook
Community Chat
Was at mcdonald's this evening and I noticed the new advertisement on the cups. Curious, I translated it on Google and this is what it says. This will be the last time I spend any money at any mcdonald's establishment. Wow
Translated text
105
84 comments
Like
Comment
Send



THERE'S A LOT TO UNPACK FROM THIS DISPLAY OF CORPORATE COSPLAY, ALL OF IT VERY MUCH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE STATE OF FAST FOOD CULTURE. OUR KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. Brands aren't sacred. McDonalds showed this last year when they leaned into the "deadly" Grimace shake meme on social. Or, if we want to go way back, Wendy's may have started it with their off-the-rails twitter account circa 2016. Calling your restaurant WcDonalds might scare a few boomers, but just look at the lines. Which brings us to…

2. LTOs and newsy releases have long been a part of the fast food landscape — Happy Meal Toys basically invented it — but they're becoming all-encompassing cultural phenomena, drawing in adults as well as kids and involving adjusted menus, media creation and more. Consider celebrity-created meals, the Cactus Plant meals at McDonalds, Taco Bell's Apple-style 2024 menu announcement video, etc.

3. A fast food brand's app is its playground to establish its identity, bring consumers into the fold and inspire repeat purchase. It feels a little strange to be emphasizing the power of apps in 2024, but this is a late development that has been a long time coming. With Zers and Alphas leaning hard into delivery and drive-through over traditional restaurant visits, the app is where to get their attention and lock in loyalty.

4. Deep subculture engagement pays off. Targeting the superfans, and showing that you know their world (And we mean really know it — a superficial take is guaranteed to backfire) will build ironclad loyalty. And the folks that don't understand it will forget it 30 seconds later.

WHAT'S IN A BRAND?

We asked Josh Glenn, our resident semiotician (and co-founder of **Semiovox, HiLoBrow** and **Significant Objects**) to unpack the meaning behind some of the most exciting **fast food brands**.

The iconic golden arches in the shape of an M — for "McDonalds" — were inspired by the architecture of the first McDonald's restaurants, specifically their roofs. (A diagonal line through the original 1961 emblem made the architectural connection clear; they were wise to lose it in '68.) The red-and-yellow logo is simultaneously stimulating and inviting, adult and child-like.

Burger King's logo — redesigned in 1969, around the same time that McDonald's perfected their logo — invites you to eat it. It's a self-immolating work of Pop Art, very friendly and inviting, yet not exactly alluring. Whereas the McDonald's logo is ever so slightly enigmatic, requiring us to participate in making sense of it, Burger King's logo comes across as overly eager to please.

Like many logos that were redesigned in the '90s, becoming more "extreme," with eye-popping colors, drop shadows, cartoonish lettering, and so forth — Taco Bell's logo has in recent years been pared down, minimalized. Its eye-catching bright purple and hot pink — chosen to stand out in a sea of fast-food logo reds, browns, and yellows — has faded to a sedate, less saturated purple. The various ornamented typefaces it once boasted have withered into a slim sans-serif without ornamentation. It looks contemporary, sure, but also soulless.

Chick-Fil-A's doodled-upon cursive logo is an example of reduction — its current line weight is more evenly weighted and lighter than it used to be, thus easier to read at all sizes — which helps. (Do we miss the chicken's more realistic, slightly scary beak? Yes, but again — a smart move.) The new logo look was undertaken as part of the brand's Millennial-centric makeover; apparently, the idea was to scrape away line weight along with the company's anti-LGBTQ+ ideology. PS: The logo today looks even more "1940s" than did the original 1940s logo… which is the sort of thing to which Baudrillard refers when he speaks of the "precession of simulacra."

In-N-Out's logo is tremendously appealing if you sentimentally long for the good old days of drive-thru burger joints; it hasn't changed much since 1954. As a result, it's one of the few fast-food chains about which many communities — in which McDonald's and Burger King are unwelcome — get excited. The flip side of this phenomenon? At a preconscious level, In-N-Out is coded "white" and "Christian"; the good old days weren't always good, not for everybody.

Dunkin' officially no longer wants to be associated with donuts — they're about coffee, bagels, breakfast sandwiches, OK? (First they retired the "Time to Make the Donuts" guy in 1997, then they dropped "Donuts" from their name in 2018.) However… their delectably plump, "powdered-candy"-colored logo, which dates to 1976, tells a different story. It's literally made of donut (OK, and cruller) shapes! A prime example of having your donut cake and eating it too.

Marco's Pizza gives us an "M" that is also a videogame controller… the formula for a perfect evening, at least for a teenaged demographic. (We're just goofing — in fact, the logo was designed in 1978.) The logo would be tighter and more iconic if the word "pizza" were removed; it hardly seems necessary to place an explanatory caption under a depiction of a pepperoni pizza. In fact, the endearing clumsiness of the logo's execution — it looks like it was drawn on a napkin; the lettering is squashed — makes one wonder if it was a designed by a teenager?

There's a certain sportiness — make that, sportsiness — to Jimmy John's logo (updated in 2000). It seems like it was generated (we wouldn't say "designed") by one of those services that crank out middle-school sports teams' branded merch, often at the last minute, for fundraisers. The varsity-letter typography is a giveaway; so are the extraneous stars inserted into the design. In fact, the letter "J" here has been so drastically foreshortened that "JJ" looks like "11" — might this be an homage to Isiah Thomas, Walt Frazier, Yao Ming? Oh wait, we've got it: Julio Jones.

"Nature enhanced through art" is how we'd translate Lowell Herb's Latin logo-lingo. The bull-headed figure also feels like a classical reference… though whereas the Minotaur of legend symbolizes the struggle between conflicting aspects of one's character, this shovel-wielding farmer seems to have found himself. (He's more gentle Ferdinand than violent Man-Bull.) The luxe Lowell Smokes pre-roll packs, printed in the USA on vintage Saroglia equipment using recycled craft paper, explain the art"part of the company's motto; the nature is inside the pack.

Lagunitas's production of ultra-hoppy IPAS marketed with a stoner-friendly vibe made it a pioneer in the craft brew space… and this was before they developed water-soluble THC-infused sparkling water. The look of the Hi-Fi Sessions can, with its matte pastels and groovy, only slightly psychedelic carbonation imagery, is millennial-therapeutic — suggesting on the one hand that the product will help you reconnect with yourself and get more enjoyment out of life, and on the other that it will support your desire to attain your ambitious personal goals.

Wyld — with its Edwardian-wallpaper illustration style, real fruit ingredients, use of white space, and strikingly unusual pack architecture is aspirational and elegant. One wouldn't associate this product with mindless munching or getting stoned out of your mind… it's about enhancement. The only thing that doesn't jibe with this powerful effect is the logo and brand name; although the deliberately archaic spelling adds to the Edwardian vibe, what's "wyld" about this product?

The look and feel of **Cookies** products pulls together two influences that shouldn't work together, but which do. The blue packaging with the all-caps, sans serif typography suggests a technology brand — there's something sci-fi about this brand, something that makes us want to believe that their product will allow us to hack our minds and our moods, optimizing and upgrading ourselves. At the same time, it tips a wink to weed culture — with the code name "cookies," complete with the snack packaging-style semi-cursive logo. Yummy.

WHAT'S IN A BRAND?

We asked Josh Glenn, our resident semiotician (and co-founder of **Semiovox, HiLoBrow** and **Significant Objects**) to unpack the meaning behind some of the most exciting **cannabis brands**.

The hip-hop term *steez* has been around since at least 1990, when Run-D.M.C. coined it — a portmanteau of *style + ease*. ("I like your steez, your style, your whole demeanor," raps Nelly in the 2002 song "Dilemma.") In the early 2000s, white skiers and snowboarders appropriated the term to describe pulling off tough moves with fluid grace. And yes, **Stiiizy** makes it look easy: The brand's look is buttoned-up, professional, quasi-medicinal…with a big wink at weed culture.

Jeeter brings a grownup sense of style and sophistication to the cannabis space — without for one second abandoning the playful, anarchical energy of adolescence. Why choose between the two? No need. The term "jeeter" originates in South Florida, where it was street slang for "joint," but Jeeter is very much a Hollywood-style brand — one that pays homage to pop culture and knows how to generate positive buzz (pun intended). Again, Jeeter has it both ways.

Camino's use of a sharp, well-balanced, Bauhaus-inspired geometric sans typeface tells you everything you need to know about this brand. It's about precision, precision, precision. You know exactly what you'll get out of each edible, leaving you very much in control of the experience. The packaging illustration is retro, but not in a wacky way — they keep it tight.

Glass Fruit Pipe - Edie Parker

https://edie-parker.com/collections/smoking-accessories-by-edie-parker/products/glass-fruit-pipe-in-cherry

Shine 24K Gold Rolling Paper

https://shinerollingpapers.com/products/shine-24k-gold-cones

Boy Smells Kush Collection Cowboy Kush

https://boysmells.com/collections/tumbleweed/products/cowboy-kush-candle-standard

Dad Grass x George Harrison Signature Rolling Papers

https://dadgrass.com/collections/dad-grass-x-george-harrison/products/

Red Otto

The world's first and only Automatic Milling Machine.

Once milled to perfection, OTTO ensures the material passes neatly and evenly into the cone with full retention of leaf, oil and kief, delivering you a superior consumption experience.

https://bananabros.com/products/red-otto

Rogue PAQ's Sendnudes Matches

https://www.roguepaq.com/products/copy-of-rogue-paq-signature-sendnudes-matches-3-packs-included

Cannabis Accoutrement

Helix One hitter

https://www.vesselbrand.com/pages/helix

Eunbi Cho rolling tray made in LA

https://www.gotham.nyc/products/rolling-tray

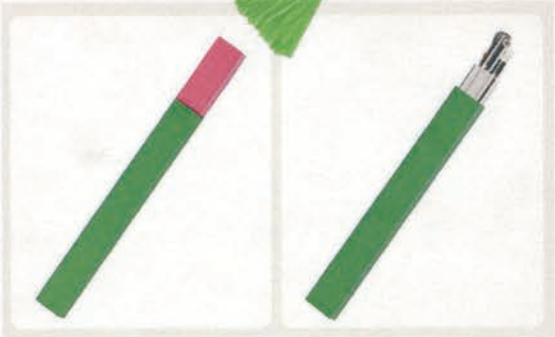
Murano Sommerso Ashtray

https://www.gotham.nyc/products/copy-of-blue-green-murano-sommerso-ashtray

Stash Logix

The ultimate "thoughtful, secure, discreet" cannabis storage system. Features built-in 3-digit programmable combination lock

https://stashlogix.co/collections/bestsellers/products/silverto



Tsubota Pearl

A slim, elegant Japanese lighter in a square shape, with a miniature flint lighting mechanism housed underneath a discreet cap

https://www.shop-tetra.com/products/stick-lighter-glossy-green-purple

Pineapple Express

Up in Smoke

The '90s and 2000s were, in a sense, the peak of the stoner film — in popularity, if not quality. Goofy comedies like *Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle* (2004) harkened back to the *Cheech and Chong* days, and the buddy comedy *Pineapple Express* (2008) brought a certain cinematic gloss to the genre.

But what happened next is the dream - and nightmare - of any stoner movie character. Legalization began to sweep across the US, transforming pot's public image and making it... well, not as funny? These films all depended on weed's illicit nature, and the risk of getting caught; without that, there just isn't as much to work with.

But don't despair, because what may be replacing stoner cinema is even more interesting.

We see the current wave of psychedelic cinema as its heir apparent. Movies like *Everything Everywhere All At Once (2022), Sorry to Bother You* (2018) and even *Mandy* (2018) may not be comedies, but they embody a mind-expanding sensibility that couldn't exist without, shall we say, mind-altering substances. In short, stoner cinema is maturing — stepping away from the easy laughs and toward a perspective on cannabis that better reflects our current culture.

Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle

Everything Everywhere All At Once

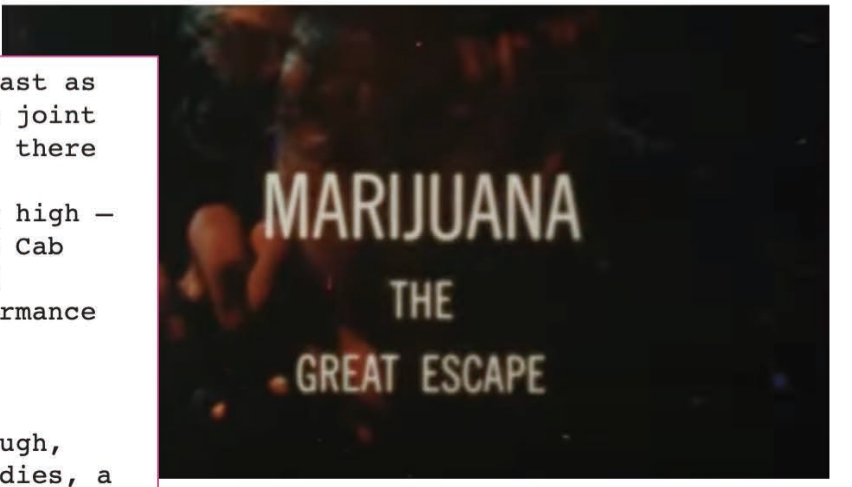
Sorry to Bother You

DID LEGALIZATION KILL STONER CINEMA?

Cannabis has been a part of cinema at least as long as sound. While anyone who passed a joint in college can name drop *Reefer Madness*, there were also plenty of films that featured marijuana gags and references to getting high — usually delivered by jazz musicians like Cab Calloway. Check out 1933's *International House* for a classic example, and a performance of Reefer Man by Calloway himself.

By the 1960s, there were two strains (cough, cough) of cannabis cinema — pro-pot comedies, a la *Cheech and Chong*, and hand-wringing moral panic movies like *Marijuana: The Great Escape* (1968). The latter are really a sub-genre of psychedelic freak-out cinema, in which some well-meaning square finds himself with a joint in front of him, takes a drag, and descends into the sinister world of the counterculture, complete with rock and roll music, light projections and, inevitably, body painting.

In the '70s and '80s, marijuana's presence in film shifted away from being a central theme, and more of a bit player — think of the shared joint in *The Breakfast Club* (1985) or the stoner comic relief of characters like Spicoli in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982).



Marijuana: The Great Escape

Reefer Madness

Fast Times at Ridgemont High

The Breakfast Club

Medical

CONGRESS.GOV

Shown Here:
Public Law No: 117-215 (12/02/2022)
Medical Marijuana and Cannabidiol Research Expansion Act

This act establishes a new, separate registration process to facilitate research on marijuana.

Specifically, the act directs the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to follow procedures specified in the act to register (1) practitioners to conduct marijuana research, and (2) manufacturers to supply marijuana for the research.

The act allows certain registered entities (including institutions of higher education, practitioners, and manufacturers) to manufacture, distribute, dispense, or possess marijuana or cannabidiol (CBD) for the purposes of medical research. Additionally, the act directs the DEA to register manufacturers and distributors of CBD or marijuana for the purpose of commercial production of an approved drug that contains marijuana or its derivative.

Finally, the act includes various other provisions, including provisions that

- require the DEA to assess whether there is an adequate and uninterrupted supply of marijuana for research purposes;
- prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from reinstating the interdisciplinary review process for marijuana research;
- allow physicians to discuss the potential harms and benefits of marijuana and its derivatives (including CBD) with patients; and
- require HHS, in coordination with the National Institutes of Health and relevant federal agencies, to report on the therapeutic potential of marijuana for various conditions such as epilepsy, as well as the impact on adolescent brains and on the ability to operate a motor vehicle.

The federal government awarded approximately $1.49 billion to scientists for cannabis research.

Most funds focus on drug abuse and adverse mental effects. The top three funding institutions include the **National Institute on Drug Abuse** (NIDA; $1.06B, NIAAA; $133.0M), the **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism** and the **National Institute of Mental Health** (NIMH; $64.9M).

Funds with a focus on the therapeutic effect of cannabinoids include the Department of Defense (DOD, Focus: PTSD, mental health, traumatic brain injury; $12.5M), **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment** (CDPHE, Focus: Therapeutic effects of whole plant vs. purified/synthetic cannabinoids; $9.1M), and the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; Most awards granted to research on cannabis regulation; $1.4M).

Source: National Library of Medicine

Marijuana

WebMD

Medical Marijuana according to WebMD

Medical marijuana, or medical cannabis, uses the cannabis plant or chemicals in it to treat symptoms or conditions. The cannabis plant contains more than 100 different chemicals called cannabinoids. Each one has a different effect on the body.

What Is Medical Marijuana Used For?

- Severe and chronic pain
- Multiple sclerosis and muscle spasms
- Severe nausea and vomiting caused by cancer treatment
- Epilepsy and seizures
- Alzheimer's disease
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- HIV/AIDS
- Crohn's disease
- Glaucoma
- Migraine
- Anorexia
- Extreme weight loss and weakness (wasting syndrome)
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

It is important to know that **many of the state sanctioned uses aren't backed by strong scientific evidence. This is partly because researchers find it hard to do studies on a drug that remains illegal under federal law.**

It's also important to realize that cannabis is almost always used to treat symptoms rather than the conditions themselves.

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

Temple University has a partnership with Cresco Labs to explore new medical uses for cannabis

Big Pharma has shown an interest in cannabis research

There has been a lot of activity in the pharmaceutical cannabis industry since 2021 including two significant acquisitions:

- **Jazz Pharmaceuticals' $7.2B** acquisition of GW Pharmaceuticals in May of 2021
- **Pfizer's $6.7B** acquisition of US biotech and cannabinoid therapy developer Arena Pharmaceuticals in March of 2022

And, quite hypocritically, there's this

Veriheal (www.veriheal.com) tracks corporate drug testing policies, and here is what they had to say about Pfizer:

Pfizer does conduct drug tests and explains that drug tests "are mandatory for all new contingent workers who perform work at a Pfizer location and who are issued a permanent Pfizer site badge."

And **Pfizer** does not appear to make accommodations for employees who are medical cannabis patients.

One research project is led by Kelly Whelan at Katz' Fels Cancer Institute for Personalized Medicine. Whelan's research has shown that the cannabis compound CBD decreases a form of food allergy in mice, which may prove beneficial to people living with food allergies.

A study led by Carlos Barrero from the School of Pharmacy's Moulder Center for Drug Discovery Research will explore the efficacy of cannabinoids as a treatment option for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Cannabis Connoisseurship
Interpeners and Ganjiers

If you've visited a dispensary, you know that cannabis flower has changed a lot since the head shop era. Indica, Sativa and Thai Stick have given way to a massive array of varietals and strains. It's a sweeping landscape not unlike that of craft beer or wine, and it can help to have someone providing guidance. Two schools have sprung up to offer certification in a rarified new world - that of the cannabis sommelier, or as they're referred to, Interpeners and Ganjiers.

The Interpener

Visit the website trichromeinstitute.com and you'll find a Denver-based company that has created the world's first program designed to evaluate flower for quality and psychotropic effects - without a strain name or lab test.

In-terp-en-ing
Interpreting Terpenes

Through a course offered by the company, you can become a certified Interpener. Courses start at $99.00 and go up to almost $500 (No weed included, we assume.)

The Ganjier®

According to ganjier.com, the Ganjier is trained in the art, science and appreciation of cannabis craft, consumption, and connoisseurship, employing multidisciplinary knowledge and astute professionalism to raise the standard of excellence throughout the cannabis industry.

The Ganjier is educated in the history, science, genetics, cultivation, processing, and consumption of cannabis, and trained in the systematic assessment and grading of the quality of cannabis and cannabis products.

According the site: The Ganjier certification isn't just a course you take; it's a fully immersive cannabis experience.

"From expert-led online courses and live in-person training at the breathtaking Humboldt campus, to weekly virtual learning sessions and a vibrant global community, the Ganjier program is guaranteed to elevate your cannabis passion and credibility."

From growing, to marketing, to branding, the following are schools that can train you in what it takes to be a cannabis professional

- **Cannabis Training University - cannabistrainingquniversity.com**
- **Green CulturED - greencultured.co**
- **Green Flower - www.green-flower.com**
- **Cleveland School of Cannabis - csceducation.com**
- **Stockton University - www.stockton.edu**
- **Northern Michigan University - cannabisstudies.nmu.edu/**

THC BEVERAGES

Your new backpocket-buddy for instant highdration

No additives or fillers, just 3 simple ingredients

Bubbly mix of hops & cannabis with a balance of THC & CBD

Amaro-inspired blend of botanicals and THC

Stonefruit & piney wood-like notes; LA Times voted it as best drink in CA

Sweet and tangy with a citrus twist

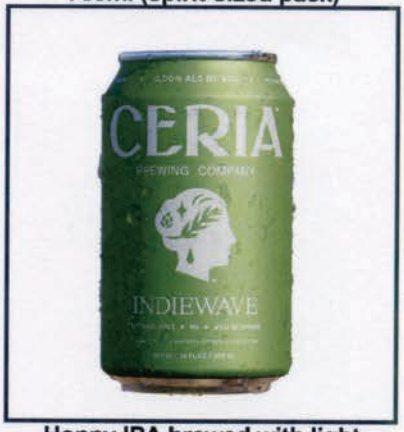
10mg THC for the buzz, 2mg CBD for the vibes, 3mg CBN for sleep

Guava seltzer: 0 Calories, 0 Carbs, 0 Sugars

Bright. Buzzy. Balanced. 750ml (spirit-sized pack)

Old-fashioned lemonade

Ranch Water is a spin on the quintessentially southern spritz



Hoppy IPA brewed with light caramel malts for flavor & balance

And they get to meet people that are unexpected. Back in the day [when we started under the radar], **you didn't know the menu or the location until the day of the event.** You didn't know who was going to be there until you walked in the door, and you didn't know the menu until you sat at the table.

C&C: What does the future of cannabis infused cuisine at restaurants look like? If you were predicting the future, do you think it will be more likely that all restaurants will adopt individual infused menu items, or that a restaurant will become an infused restaurant and be known for it?

HMS: 100% Both. **There are people that want to do all-infused restaurants,** which I think is ridiculous. And then there are people who say, you'll be able to go to a pizza spot, and you can order any pizza you want, infused or non-infused. It's like, wherever you go, you can get infused or not infused TBD. It's like saying I can get a beverage with or without alcohol or without anywhere I go.

Like, imagine once we're able to actually bring this into hospitality - you know, resorts, hotels, restaurants, different kinds of food service spots. **Once this becomes a normal thing, it's endless, what we can do** with this shit. We want to work on a B2B level, with other restaurants and hospitality groups, to help them understand and learn how to infuse their menus and their offerings and their experiences, whether they use our products or not.

Hawaii Mike Salman is the co-founder of Chef for Higher, a legacy to legal cannabis business based in NYC (www.chefforhigher.com)

We scare the shit out of ourselves constantly to create anxiety because that's how we're programmed as human beings in this society that we live in. The powers that be want us to be scared, they want us to be in fear. If a doctor, because they have a white coat, and a fucking diploma behind them, goes, "Hey, try this and let me know how it works." You trust that?

Energy is everything. And energy is everywhere. Every single thing that we do is energy. You do it with intention, you can move mountains.

C&C: If someone is going out for a joint or a drink, they know what they're doing at that moment, but with infused foods it seems like it can be a bit more random and confusing.

HMS: How do you know how much you're getting when you smoke? You don't. That's what I'm trying to explain to you. You're missing the point of the normalizing part. You've normalized smoking a joint in your mind because you've done it so many times. The fact that you get higher this one time you smoke or you get less high another time isn't a big deal. It's just part of the experience. It's what happens. Right? **That's the normalization part. Take our infused cooking oils, for instance extra virgin olive oil.** As soon as you say it's infused people go, Well, how the fuck do I use it? The same way you fucking use extra virgin olive oil. There's no difference.

C&C: Switching gears, what about the taste of cannabis?

HMS: It brings out this weird, nutty, almost kind of burnt flavor to it. It's not sexy, right? As soon as you **decarboxylate the flower**, it doesn't taste good. We use extracts instead of flower.

C&C: How do you use extracts?

HMS: Well, the extracts have to go into a carrier first, which is our extra virgin olive oil, coconut oil, honey and ghee. **The extract doesn't go directly into the food.** If you just put extracts in the meals, it will not disperse properly. You know, you've heard that phrase "oil and water don't mix" - you can't just throw an oil into something and think it's gonna blend properly. Especially very viscous oils - they have a very high melting point. Put that into something cold and you'll just have a glob and then you're going to eat that. That would be disgusting. You wouldn't want to do that.

C&C: Why put your extracts into coconut oil, olive oil, honey and ghee?

HMS: Coconut oil has the highest bioavailability, extra virgin olive oil is in every single person's house, and honey is in probably 90% of people's homes. All three of those products are super foods. I look at cannabis as a superfood as a super, super, super, duper food because its medicinal properties have all of these benefits, right? So now you have super-super foods because they're infused with THC.

C&C: Did you start this trend?

HMS: Yeah - we're the first culinary brand on the market. We're the first coconut oil we're the first olive oil, we're the first honey and we will be the first ghee. Nobody can take that away. Nobody has an extra virgin olive oil. Nobody has a coconut oil. One honey just came out.

C&C: Why do you think your Supper Clubs and Social Club have been so successful?

HMS: You know, eating is one of the few things that we do with other people -it's not like, we're having sex with groups of people all the time, right? So, for me, it's always been about kind of showing and sharing. We're all the same, you know, in so many different ways. **Food has an equanimity factor to it, right? It's an equalizer.** And so it kind of brings everybody's guard down. One of the fun things I love is seeing how many friends and relationships have been started at our Supper Club, because people feel safe to be who they are.

C&C: What were your first edibles?

HMS: So we started working on **gummies and confections** and, you know, doing Rice Krispies and shit like that, but it was really the gummies. My wife was dealing with some mental health issues and smoking was great, but when she came down off it, it could create mood swings. We realized that **consuming THC through food - through your liver - kind of prolonged the benefits.** And we found that we could level things out if you dosed every so often, which was about three to four hours. So, we got really good at making gummies. They were the first real product we made - those were like the staple. I figured out how to make confections - you know, hours and hours and hours of fucking figuring this shit out.

C&C: So how did it go from gummies to cooking?

HMS: Well, like I said, every mammal that has vertebrae on this planet has a **system of receptors called the Endocannabinoid System** that regulates every other system in your body. So basically, the Endocannabinoid System wants you to create homeostasis for your internal environment. **And cannabis can help regulate it.**

But again, everybody eats, right? Everybody eats, and everybody has an Endocannabinoid System. So why not use the universal language of food to share the benefits of this plant?

HMS: If you want to incorporate cannabis into your lifestyle, to me, **the easiest way to do it is through things that you already do.** We eat every day. It's seamless. So why not create cooking oils and other essentials that we utilize in the kitchen for preparing meals to infuse the food, and then get the benefits of cannabis into our system?

C&C: I'm so curious… how did it go from okay, this is a good way to get the benefits of the plant to I'm going to do these cool dinners?

HMS: **Well, you can't educate people if they're not engaged** - information has to be received, and you have to be open to receive information. So, my thought was, why not entertain people with the exact thing that we're trying to educate them on? You know, and kind of knock out two birds with one stone. And so that's how the Supper Club was born. It was really an educational thing that just happened to be really fun. So we did the first official one with a menu in August 2015. We operated monthly until March 2020 - 54 months in a row. Now we have the **Social Club** - (C&C note: based in Brooklyn, The Social Club is billed as the intersection of commUNITY, culinary & culture) and I'm gonna try to bring the Supper Club back.

C&C: What are the important things to know about infusing? What have you learned?

HMS: Well, **our mantra is responsible consumption through proper dosing.** Right. So, you know, I think it's about dosing and understanding what you're giving to people, how much you can give, when you do it, what is the meal they're eating? Are they eating one dish? Are they eating a coursed meal? Understanding the difference is important. It's important to know when things are gonna hit or how much the client wants. So it's really the dosing that's the biggest thing.

Cannabis Cuisine

Meet "Hawaii" Mike Salman

What started as a look at cannabis cuisine quickly became a deep dive into the impact that "Hawaii" Mike Salman has had on innovation, marketing, and the culture of marijuana. His position in the industry goes well beyond simply cooking with pot.

Any article about Mike Salman has to begin with understanding his personality.

Part alchemist, part chef, part business maven and entrepreneur, and a whole lot of high-vibe style guru, Hawaii, as he's affectionately known, does not suffer fools. He has the kind of edge that comes from running a marijuana business in NYC for a long time, but pairs that edge with a gentle and soul-nurturing disposition.

Hawaii Mike started out delivering high-end cannabis across the five boroughs of NYC. He caught the wave of edibles early; he and his wife Stephanie (they're now divorced) established an exclusive roving dining club known to insiders as **The Supper Club**, in which Mike prepares and serves foods that have been infused with cannabis oil. In the early days, scoring an invite to one of these meals was not easy. A seven-course meal (with a smoke break) could set you back over $150. Today, **Chef for Higher** is in the business of selling cannabis in all forms, from flower to pre-rolls and more, but the primary focus of the brand is on edibles, ingestibles and all things food and drink.

Having had the chance to experiment with a multitude of THC applications seems to have helped Hawaii hone his culinary craft, and he remains a leading innovator in the cannabis cuisine category.

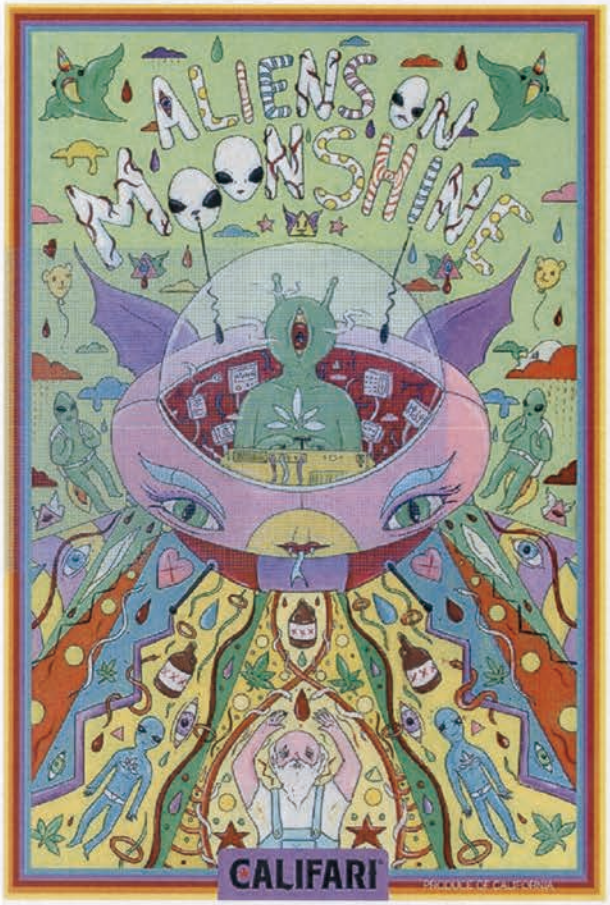
Life really is a fucking map. And it's like, if you can follow the coordinates and make the turns at the right place when like the GPS says to turn, you'll be amazed – everything clicks together.

C&C: First off, when did you start Chef for Higher, and what prompted you to open a business focused on the food applications of pot?

HMS: We began the process of developing CFH in 2013, once legalization started to happen in Colorado and Washington State. We started it because I was known for cannabis - I was selling weed. I got into the music industry, and cannabis is a big part of it. **I happened to meet somebody from Seattle who was cooking with cannabis, and I was intrigued** by it - it just kind of went from there. And the whole idea was to launch here in New York, because New York is the largest THC consumption market in the world, but it's also the capital of business, finance, music, style, fashion, and food.

And so, where better to launch the first culinary brand of cannabis than New York? **Chef for Higher has had the first coconut oil, the first olive oil, and the first honey** in the New York market - we are a culinary brand. And, you know, since everybody has an Endocannabinoid System, and everybody eats, we thought, the universal language of food is the greatest way to introduce people to the benefits of using cannabis to balance out their life.

Cannabis Arts & Letters



Califari.com is on a mission to discover & visualize the personality of cannabis strains. "Aliens on Moonshine," an indica hybrid (visually interpreted above) has a high percentage of CBD, "that gives a nice body high and feelings of relaxation that abduct your pain."

Santa Cruz
Weed Goddess -
Santacruzskateboards.com

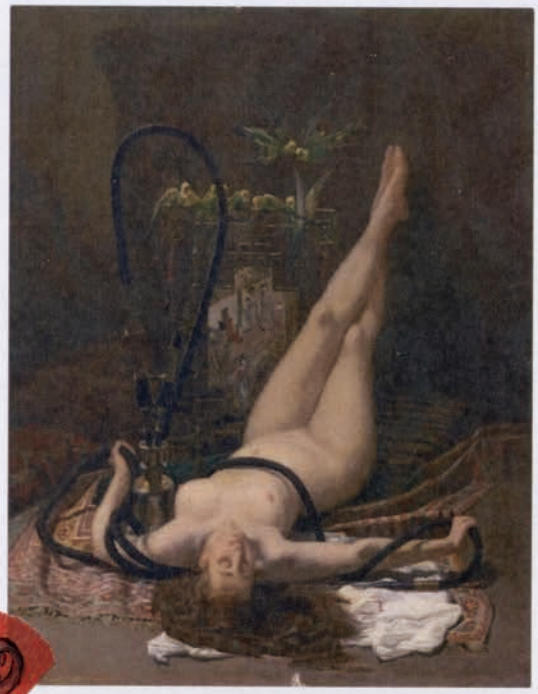
Cannabis in Film
Pineapple Express
Reefer Madness
The Big Lebowksi
Half-Baked

Shennong, as depicted in 1503 by Guo Xu. In Chinese mythology, Shennong taught humans the use of the plow, aspects of basic agriculture, and the use of cannabis.

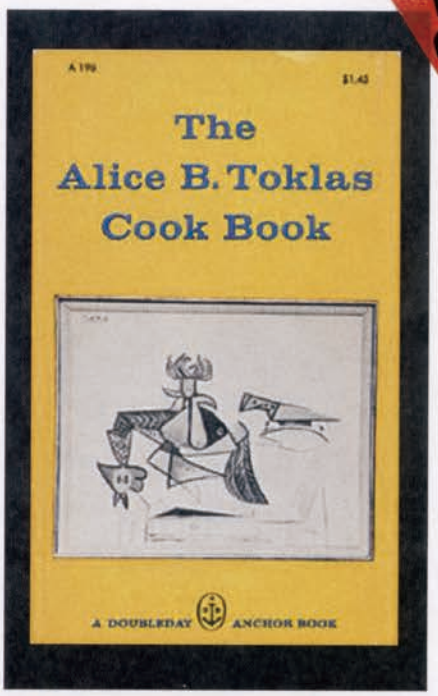
Cannabis Arts & Letters

LIFE = ART

Secrets d'alcove d'un atelier - Pablo Picasso

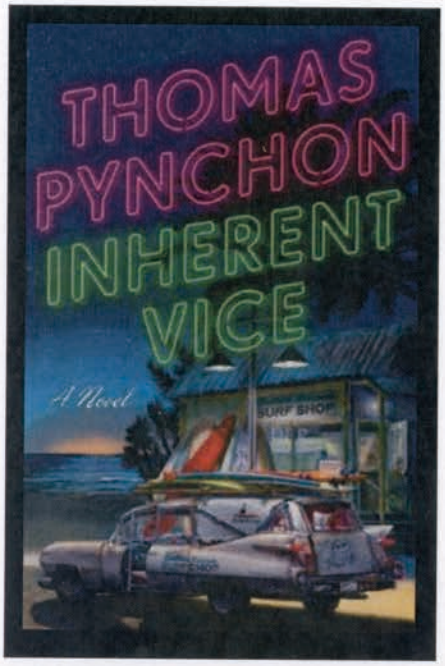


A Voluptuous Smoke
- Charles Edouard Edmond Delort



Its most famous culinary experiment is a concoction called "Hashish Fudge," made from spices, nuts, fruit, and cannabis.

Cannabis Arts & Letters



Inherent Vice, *by American author Thomas Pynchon, originally published in August 2009, is a darkly comic detective novel set in 1970s California. The plot follows sleuth Larry "Doc" Sportello whose ex-girlfriend asks him to investigate a scheme involving a prominent land developer. Themes of drug culture and counterculture are prominently featured.*

By Scott Deppe, the founder of Mothership, a glass artist collective Prices for these hand-blown pipes can reach $100,000 - talkingoutyourglass.com

U NEVER KNOW

Goth Cannabis Short Kimono Robe abysm - internal.com

Men's Weed Smoking Human Underwear - goodlucksock.com

The Cottage Core Bong - shopburninglove.com

Cannabis Arts & Letters

Cannabis Sativa by Franz Eugen Köhler (1887)

Pot's New Home on the Range

How an unexpected group, in an equally unexpected place, is undercutting legal cannabis

Legal cannabis industry sales are suffering because of the black market; consumers can buy less expensive product through illegal means, typically pay lower prices, and avoid taxes. This was not supposed to occur as states legalized cannabis, and it's adding complexity to an already complex category. **The place currently most associated with illegal growing and moving of marijuana? Oklahoma!**

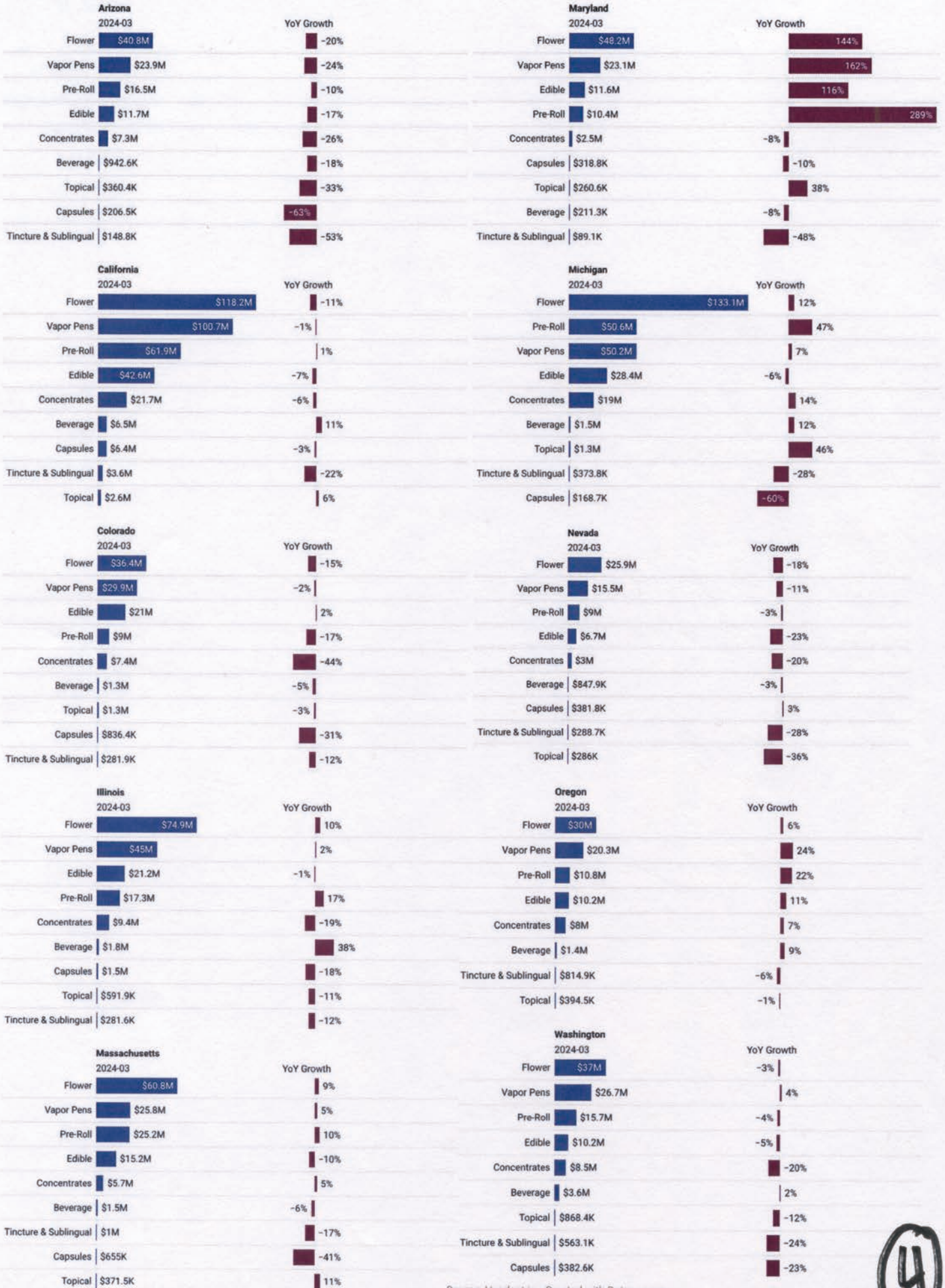
The illegal cannabis trade illustrates the complexity of an industry in flux that is operating in uncharted territory. This makes entering the business risky and uncertain. There's lots of upside potential to selling legal cannabis, but this is most definitely not a business for the faint of heart.

In March of 2024 *The Oklahoman* reported that Chinese organized crime had overtaken the illicit Marijuana trade in the US. The paper was quoting an investigation conducted by ProPublica and the Frontier, an Oklahoman non-profit news organization.

The mobsters in Oklahoma operate in a loosely connected confederation overseen from New York by mafias rooted in southern China, according to state and federal officials. Oklahoma has quickly become a significant supplier of illicit weed; the state has a low barrier to entry for growing, because of relatively low labor, land and licensing costs. According to *The Oklahoman*, officials estimate the value of the illegal marijuana trade in the state at somewhere between $18 billion and $44 billion. State investigators have found links between foreign mafias and over 3,000 illegal grow operations.

Category Sales and Growth

Comparing sales in March'24 with March'23 across cannabis markets in the US.

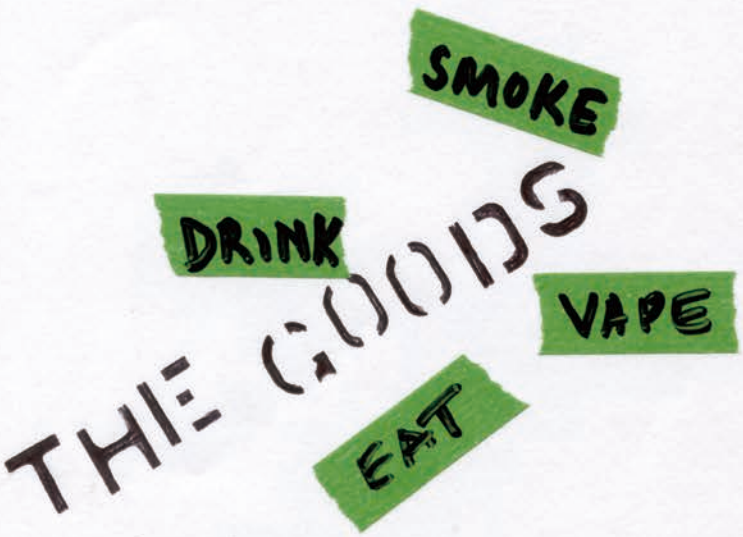


Source: Headset.io • Created with Datawrapper

4

From a product category and brand perspective, the story is even harder to clarify

Though data is scant, Headset.io is the number one source of data analysis - like a SPINS or IRI for the cannabis industry. Here's a look at some top product category information from Headset's reported data, which is sourced from actual consumer transactions at one of their 3,500+ cannabis retail partners in the United States & Canada.



Scott Vickers, CTO and Founding partner of Headset on product formats and brands:

I think Wyld and Kiva are great brands. They have really limited products and they're focused on making and managing them to scale across many markets.

Steezy is giant in California. They have stores, but they also distribute, and they have their proprietary pods, which help get people locked in if they like them. But it's also hard to start that flywheel going.

The top selling edible for years was Mr. Maxis mints. For whatever reason people in Washington state really liked mints. But they tried to reproduce that in other states, and it just didn't go. There's probably hundreds of similar stories where somebody's really successful in one state and just can't capture that elsewhere.

A look at sales for March 2024 vs. March 2023 in a subset of key markets, including two of the earliest markets to legalize adult use cannabis(CA and CO,) reveals that flower, vapor pens, pre-rolls and edibles are the biggest sellers. **(See sales data on the following page)** Overall, it looks like inhaling rather than ingesting is still the preferred way to consume THC. But it's also interesting to note that in two of our OG markets (CA and CO), there are declines across virtually all categories, YOY. This trend has been widely reported and reflects consumers returning to the black market for lower cost products, and a post COVID ramp down (sales spiked during the pandemic.)

Beverages appear to be an ascendant format, and national non-cannabis brands like Pabst Blue Ribbon and Lagunitas are helping to legitimize this product format. THC beverages are a normalizing force for cannabis because they can be consumed at a social gathering or as an after-work unwind, much like a beer or glass of wine. However, the actual sales are quite small relative to other forms, so it is unclear if they will continue their rapid ascent.

So what does this all mean?

Legal cannabis is an emerging market that is currently pegged at 40B and fraught with supply chain, retail and government issues that have created significant headwinds. However, overall, the consumer demand for cannabis does not seem to be receding. A December 2023 Yahoo Finance headline brought some additional context, "Beer consumption declines with many shifting to cannabis." The Cali-sober movement, normalizing product formats (e.g. drinks,) a recognized value related to health and wellness, and two generations of consumers who have grown up under the auspices of legalized pot clearly indicate that this is a growth industry. The issue of how the legal market will deal with an active black market is one to be reckoned with.

The US Government may soon change its position on banking for the industry

The SAFER Banking Act aims to allow state-legal cannabis businesses access to traditional financial services, reducing the risk assumed by financial institutions, lenders, insurers, and others serving the industry despite federal restrictions on cannabis. The act has passed in the US House of Representatives on seven occasions. And on September 27, 2023, the US Senate Banking Committee advanced the bill. It was placed on the Senate legislative calendar under general orders the following day. A Senate floor vote is now pending.

On the retail side, the recent news is mixed

Over the past few years, many cannabis markets faced serious margin compression, making it more difficult to operate profitably. As far back as the end of 2022, Bloomberg reported that falling retail and wholesale prices were challenging the legal pot market. This does not seem to be changing any time soon, as the black market has put pressure on legal retailers to keep prices low.

MedMen

MedMen, once a beacon of retail promise, is virtually out of business

Anyone who has visited Southern California in the past decade has seen the hip logo of MedMen on retail stores throughout LaLa Land. With its high touch branding, stellar customer service and Apple Store vibe, these legal dispensaries portended big things for the potential of legal retail businesses. Founded in 2010, MedMen's West Hollywood location was one of the first retail stores to open in California when the state legalized recreational cannabis Since then, the company's fortunes have drastically changed. This headline from a Morningstar report on January 12, 2024 says it all: **MedMen goes from height of $3 billion valuation to zero as stock draws cease-trade order and top execs leave.** A cursory review of the company's Wikipedia profile shows no history after 2020 and reads like an advertisement for the company, and their website has been "undergoing maintenance" for months.

TWO KEY RETAILERS

curaleaf

According to Forbes, Curaleaf leads the US pack with a market capitalization of 3.1B and sales of 1.3B. Curaleaf operates in 17 states, has 147 retail locations, and well over 900 wholesale partner accounts nationwide. In 2023, the company announced its plans to close operations in California, Colorado, and Oregon in an aggressive effort to cut costs. Curaleaf is based in Wakefield, Massachusetts. However, its stock is listed on the Canadian Securities Exchange (CSE). CURLF trades as an ADR in the U.S. OTC market.

Green Thumb

The number two company according to the same report is Green Thumb Industries, with a market capitalization of 2.8B. Sales are reported at over 1B and the company experienced a 13.9% increase in 2023. Green Thumb Industries is another American cannabis company trading on the CSE. The company's GTBIF ticker trades as an ADR on the U.S. OTC market.

Cannabusiness

The State of a Growth Industry in Flux

Making sense of the business of cannabis is not an easy thing as sales data and projections can be a bit murky.

According to projections from Statista, **total US revenue from cannabis is expected to reach $42+ Billion in 2024.**

- The worldwide cannabis market is projected to reach a revenue of US$64.06B in 2024.
- It is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2024-2029) of 3.01%, resulting in a market volume of US$74.29B by 2029.
- When compared globally, the United States is expected to generate the highest revenue in 2024

IMAGINE - a 40 Billion dollar industry that is unbankable

As most of us know, banks are licensed federally, and cannot knowingly accept funds that come from federally illegal businesses. In the case of cannabis, this remains true even though it's legal (for medical or recreational use)in over 38 states.

According to Bloomberg, cannabis companies may not be able to open accounts at the JPMorgan Chases and Citigroups of the world anytime soon, but that hasn't stopped small banks from rapidly entering the space. In fact, the number of credit unions and state-chartered banks venturing into the industry has been quietly accelerating.

Show me the Money!!

Intermediary firms, Green Check Verified and Shield Compliance, are helping cannabis businesses deal with regulatory issues

Green Check Verified creates software for banks to help them with with the regulatory issues associated with working in cannabis. In February of this year, Bloomberg reported that Green Check experienced significant growth. Over 8,800 cannabis businesses are now on its industry-leading platform (a 131% increase), sales have reached more than $6 billion (a 74% increase), and total deposits across the platform were reported at over $9 billion (a 35% increase.)

Shield Compliance, another company that helps financial firms do business with the cannabis industry, has also experienced strong growth. Again, in a quote to Bloomberg, Tony Repanich, the company's president said, "We're seeing more and more bankers recognize that there's a clear path to serving these customers. The playbook has been established showing banks and regulators how to work with the industry."

GREEN CHECK

shield compliance

CASH & CARRY

Issue No. 1 – Summer 2024

Read and share this issue digitally!

Why would anyone create a zine in 2024?

We've always been obsessed with magazines. From big-name periodicals like **The New Yorker** and **MAD**, to scrappy zines like **MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL** and the countless self-published screeds that friends would hand out at punk shows, to hyper-focused publications like **Lucky Peach, Animerica**, **RES** and **MOLD**. And of course we can't forget the ultra-luxe books, either – **Interview, Wallpaper, Monocle, W** and more.

Today, we still see a lot of appeal for the printed word. Substack is awesome, but nothing beats opening the mailbox and finding something crisp and heavy, ready to be cracked open and read from cover to cover.

So we're experimenting with a zine of our own – it's rough, it's photocopied, and each page's layout was done with real glue, scissors and tape. Our work in branding, consumer insights, and innovation gives us a unique window into the workings of the marketing world, and this is an opportunity to share our perspective. It's a place where we are free to explore topics that fascinate us, with the space to go deep and tackle unexpected angles.

In this issue, we ended up splitting it between two! So choose which side you want to start from, and dig in. We hope you enjoy.

The CE Team
NYC
Summer 2024

Created by

CONSUMER EYES

CASH & CARRY

MARKETING CULTURE

Issue No. 1